

The Future of Libraries: What North Carolina Librarians Think

by Robert Burgin

In 2001, North Carolina Library Association President Ross Holt established a Commission on the Future of Libraries and the Book to explore the issues surrounding the future of the book given the impact of ever changing technologies, and the future of libraries as they respond to these changes. As part of this process, the NCLA Commission on the Future of Libraries and the Book conducted a Web-based survey of North Carolina librarians in August 2003 to find out what they thought about the challenges facing libraries over the next few years.

A total of 325 responses were received from librarians throughout the state. The numbers and percentages of respondents in various groups within that

total are shown in Table 1. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents were professional librarians (63%); nearly half held positions in public services (46%); over half represented public libraries (57%). Years of experience ranged from 0 to 40 years, with a mean of 14 years and a median of 11 years.

The purpose of this article is to summarize the findings of the survey. As with any Web-based survey, the results may be skewed by the self-selection bias of the respondents, who may not be representative of the target population of individuals who work in libraries in North Carolina.¹ Nevertheless, the results can be regarded as a reasonably accurate estimate of the attitudes of North Carolina's librarians.

Challenges

Each respondent was first asked to rate the significance of several challenges to her or his type of library in the future. Ten challenges were listed, and three future time frames were listed — five years, ten years, and twenty years. In addition, respondents were provided with an "Other" category and allowed to submit their own challenges. For

Table 1. Respondents

	Number	Percentage
All respondents	325	100 %
Professional status		
Paraprofessional	87	27 %
Professional	202	63 %
Other	30	9 %
Position		
Administration	80	25 %
Public Services	147	46 %
Technical Services	45	14 %
Other	45	14 %
Type of Library		
2-Year Academic Library	22	7 %
4-Year Academic Library	71	22 %
Public Library	183	57 %
School Library	17	5 %
Other	27	8 %
Years of Experience		
5 Years or Less	87	27 %
Between 5 and 22 Years	152	48 %
22 Years or More	86	26 %

each challenge and each future time frame, respondents were asked to rate the challenge as very significant, somewhat significant, or of little significance for that time frame. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Overall ranking of future challenges
(Based on the percentage of respondents who rated the challenge as very significant)

	5 years	10 years	20 years
Funding	84 %	82 %	82 %
Relevance to the user community	53 %	58 %	60 %
Free and fair access to information	52 %	56 %	56 %
Censorship and intellectual freedom	47 %	47 %	46 %
Facilities	45 %	52 %	58 %
Changing demographics of the user community	42 %	50 %	50 %
Marketing	38 %	43 %	46 %
Recruitment of professional librarians	34 %	43 %	45 %
Recruitment of para-professional librarians	29 %	33 %	34 %
Competition from the for-profit sector	15 %	23 %	27 %

Funding

Not surprisingly, funding was rated as the most significant challenge by respondent for all three future time frames by a wide margin. Thus, 84% of respondents rated funding as a very significant challenge five years into the future; 82 per cent rated it as a very significant challenge ten years into the future; and 82 per cent rated it as a very significant challenge twenty years into the future. Respondents from school libraries and 2-year academic libraries, respondents in administration, and respondents with twenty-two years or more of experience gave this challenge the highest ratings. Even respondents from 4-year academic libraries, the group least likely to rate funding as a very significant challenge, did so in large numbers: 79 per cent for five years into the future, 68 per cent for ten years into the future, and 71 per cent for twenty years into the future. In fact, funding was the top-ranked challenge for all groups of respondents, in most cases, by a substantial margin.

Relevance to the user community. Relevance to the user community was a consistent second to funding as the most significant challenge facing their libraries in the future, according to

the survey's respondents. In all, 53 per cent of the respondents rated relevance to the user community as a very significant challenge five years from the present; 58 per cent, ten years from the present; and 60 per cent, twenty years from the present. Relevance to the user community was rated most highly by respondents with twenty-two years or more of experience, by respondents in administration, and by respondents from school libraries. It was rated as less important for respondents from 2-year academic libraries, respondents with positions in technical services, and respondents with five or fewer years of experience.

Free and fair access to information

Free and fair access to information was the only other challenge to be rated as very significant by more than half of the respondents for all three time frames: 52 per cent of the respondents rated free and fair access to information as a very significant challenge five years from now; 56 per cent, ten years from now; and 56 per cent, twenty years from now. This challenge was ranked third among the challenges at five and ten years into the future but dropped to fourth (behind facilities) at the twenty-year time frame. The challenge was rated most highly by respondents with twenty-two years or more of experience, by respondents from 4-year academic libraries, and respondents with positions in public services. It was relatively less important for respondents from school libraries and 2-year academic libraries and respondents with five or fewer years of experience.

Censorship and intellectual freedom

While the challenge of censorship and intellectual freedom was the fourth-ranked challenge in the near-term future (five years from the present), it fell to sixth for the middle-term (ten years) and long-term future (twenty years). Nevertheless, the percentage of respondents who rated this challenge as very significant was consistent, and its decline in the rankings was due to the rising

concern for the challenges of facilities and changing demographics of the user community, which are examined in more detail below. Respondents from 4-year academic libraries and school libraries and respondents with twenty-two years or more of experience gave censorship and intellectual freedom the highest ratings. Lower ratings were given to the challenge by respondents from 2-year academic libraries and respondents with five or fewer years of experience.

Four challenges — marketing, recruitment of professional librarians, recruitment of paraprofessional librarians, and competition from the for-profit sector — were consistently ranked as the least significant of the challenges listed. Nevertheless, all of the challenges were seen as gaining in significance in the long-term future, and by the twenty-year mark, nearly half of the respondents considered marketing (46 per cent) and recruitment of professional librarians to be very significant challenges. Likewise, over one-fourth of the respondents rated recruitment of paraprofessional librarians (34 per cent) and competition from the for-profit sector (27 per cent) to be very significant twenty years into the future.

Only 28 respondents provided a response to the “Other” category. Of those who rated their other response in terms of importance over the next five, ten, and twenty years, the majority felt that the challenges would be very significant. Sixty four percent rated their “other” challenge as a very significant challenge five years from now; 74 per cent, ten years from now; and 75 per cent, twenty years from now. These “other” challenges ranged from changing formats to document delivery to fair use and copyright, with challenges related to electronic formats being the most common.

Challenges Expected to Become More/Less Important

The survey results can also be examined to determine the challenges that respondents feel will become more significant or less significant in the long-term future. This analysis can be accomplished by comparing the relative difference between the percentage of respondents who rated a challenge as very significant five years into the future and the percentage who rated a challenge as very significant twenty years into the future. Challenges are listed below as expected to become more important if the relative difference in those percentages was greater than 20 per cent. Challenges are listed below as expected to become less important if the relative difference in those percentages was less than minus 20 per cent.

For the survey’s respondents, the following challenges were expected to become more significant:

- Competition from the for-profit sector
- Recruitment of professional librarians
- Facilities
- Marketing

By contrast, none of the challenges was expected to become less important.

Competition from the for-profit sector

The challenge of competition from the for-profit sector, while ranked last among the challenges in the survey, was nevertheless seen as a challenge that would become more significant in the future. While only 15 per cent of all respondents rated it as very significant five years from now, 27 per cent rated it that highly twenty years into the future — a relative increase of 80 per cent. The increasing significance of competition from the for-profit sector was felt strongest by respondents from public libraries, respondents in administration and public services, and respondents with five or fewer years of experience.

Recruitment of professional librarians

The challenge of recruiting professional librarians was expected to increase in importance by about one-third; 34 per cent of all respondents rated it as a very significant challenge in the short-term (five years), but 45 per cent rated it as very significant in the long-term (twenty years). The increasing significance of this challenge was greatest for paraprofessional respondents, respondents from

2-year academic libraries, and respondents in administration. Only respondents from school libraries saw this challenge as decreasing in importance between the five-year and twenty-year dates.

Facilities.

Facilities were a challenge that 45 per cent of the respondents rated as very significant five years into the future but rated as very significant twenty years into the future by 58 per cent of the respondents — a relative increase of 29 per cent. The increasing significance of facilities as a challenge to libraries was felt strongest by respondents from 2-year academic libraries and respondents who had five or fewer years of experience. By contrast, respondents from 4-year academic libraries and those with technical services positions saw the challenge of facilities as becoming slightly less significant in the long-term future.

Marketing

Twenty-one per cent more of all respondents rated marketing as a very significant challenge at the 20-year mark (46 per cent) than did so at the 5-year mark (38 per cent). This increase in the significance of marketing as a challenge to libraries was most obvious among respondents from 2-year academic libraries and those from 4-year academic libraries.

Key Challenges by Group

As Table 1 shows, the respondents can be classified into several groups: by professional status (paraprofessional and professional); by position (administration, public services, and technical services); by type of library (2-year academic, 4-year academic, public, and school); and by years of experience (5 years or less and 22 years or more). The key challenges for each group can then be examined to show the similarities and differences among groups. (Key challenges are defined here as those rated as very significant by more than 60 per cent of the group for a future time frame.)

Professional status

For respondents who identified themselves as paraprofessional librarians, only funding was rated as a key challenge. This was true for each of the future time frames listed — five years, ten years, and twenty years. No other challenge was rated as a key challenge, i.e., rated as very significant by more than 60 per cent of the paraprofessional respondents.

While the professional librarians agreed that funding was a key challenge at all points in the future, these respondents also rated relevance to the user community as key for the middle-term (ten years) and long-term future (twenty years) and rated facilities as key for the long-term.

Position

Like the paraprofessional respondents, the respondents in public services and technical services positions rated only funding as a key challenge, and both groups did so for each of the future time frames listed — five years, ten years, and twenty years.

For the respondents in administration, funding was also a key challenge in each of the three future time frames, but other challenges were key for the middle-term (ten years) and long-term future (twenty years). At the ten-year mark, relevance to the user community was also considered a key challenge, while at the twenty-year mark, relevance to the user community, facilities, and the changing demographics of the user community joined funding as key issues.

Type of library

Respondents from 2-year academic libraries rated funding as the only key challenge for each of the future time frames listed — five years, ten years, and twenty years.

Respondents from 4-year academic libraries also rated funding as a key challenge at five years, ten years, and twenty years into the future. However, this group added censorship and intellectual freedom as a key challenge for the middle-term future (ten years). Interestingly, the 4-year academic librarians

were the only group to rate this challenge as key at any point in the future.

For respondents from public libraries, funding was a key challenge for the three future time frames. Not surprisingly, this group also rated relevance to the user community as a key challenge for both the middle-term (ten years) and long-term future (twenty years).

Like the other groups, respondents from school libraries rated funding as a key challenge at five years, ten years, and twenty years into the future. School librarians were also concerned about facilities and rated that challenge as key for the middle-term (ten years) and long-term future (twenty years). Like their public library colleagues, the school librarians rated relevance to the user community as a key challenge for the long-term future (twenty years).

Years of experience

Respondents with the least experience (5 years or less) rated funding as a key

challenge for each of the future time frames — five years, ten years, and twenty years. This group also rated facilities as a key challenge but only for the long-term future (twenty years).

For respondents with the most experience (22 years or more), there were three key issues at each of the future time frames. Funding, fair and free access to information, and relevance to the user community were all rated as key challenges by this group. Interestingly, the more experienced respondents were the only group to rate fair and free access to information as key at any point in the future.

Issues

Each respondent was then asked to rate the degree to which several issues would affect her or his type of library in the future. Eleven issues were listed, and three future time frames were listed — five years, ten years, and twenty years. For each issue and each future time frame, the respondent was asked to indicate whether the issue would greatly influence her or his type of library for that future time frame, whether its influence would not change, or whether the issue would have declining or little influence. The results are shown in Table 3, which ranks the issues for each time frame by the percentage of respondents who rated the challenge as having great influence.

Individual demand for electronic or virtual services. Individual demand for electronic or virtual services was consistently ranked first among the issues for all three future time frames. Three-fourths of the respondents rated this issue as having great influence five years from the present; 79 per cent, ten years from the present; and 79 per cent, twenty years from the present. Respondents with technical services positions, respondents from 4-year and 2-year academic libraries, and respondents with professional positions were most likely to see this issue as having great influence. Respondents from school libraries were least likely to rate the issue as greatly influential in the short run (five years into the future), but they saw its influence as increasing substantially by the twenty-year mark.

Table 3. Overall ranking of future issues

(Based on the percentage of respondents who feel that the issue will greatly influence the future of their type of library).

	5 years	10 years	20 years
Individual demand for electronic or virtual services	75%	79%	79%
Provision of information and content in electronic format	68%	75%	77%
Service to adults [students and faculty] on-site in the library	56%	46%	45%
Service to adults [students and faculty] off-site or electronically (virtually)	54%	69%	71%
Service to youth on-site in the library	50%	46%	46%
Individual demand for personal (in person or phone) services	49%	45%	44%
Provision of materials in print format	49%	40%	38%
Influence on the direction of the library by external influences (e.g. economic, community, political, religious, etc.—other than library users, administration and Board.)	48%	49%	59%
Library as a community [campus] center or gathering place	41%	41%	42%
Service to youth off-site or electronically (virtually)	37%	48%	51%
Library as an independent institution (versus outsourcing or absorption by larger or separate entity)	23%	28%	30%

Provision of information and content in electronic format

Similarly, the provision of information and content in electronic format was consistently ranked as the second most important issue for all three future time frames. Just over two-thirds of all respondents (68 per cent) rated this issue as having great influence at the five-year mark; 75 per cent, at the ten-year mark; and 77 per cent, at the twenty-year mark. Respondents from 4-year academic libraries and school libraries and respondents with technical services positions rated this issue more highly. On the other hand, the provision of information and content in electronic format was rated less highly by respondents with public services positions, respondents with paraprofessional positions, and respondents from public libraries. Nevertheless, all three groups saw the issue as increasing in influence substantially by the twenty-year mark.

Service to adults (or students and faculty) on-site in the library

By contrast, service to adults (or students and faculty) on-site in the library was ranked quite differently in the short-term future and in the longer-term future. This issue was ranked as the third most important issue five years into the future, as 56 per cent of all respondents rated the issue as having great influence. But the issue declined in importance ten years into the future (ranked sixth among all issues and rated as having great influence by only 46 per cent of respondents) and twenty years into the future (ranked seventh, rated as having great influence by 45 per cent of respondents). On-site service was seen as most important by respondents from 2-year academic libraries, by respondents with twenty-two or more years of experience, and by respondents with administrative positions. Less likely to rate the issue as having great influence were respondents from school libraries and respondents with five or fewer years of experience. Service to adults (or students and faculty) off-site or electronically (virtually). Not surprisingly, while on-site service to adults (or students and faculty) decreased in importance, service to those individuals off-site increased in importance. The issue rose from a ranking of fourth at the five-year mark to a ranking of third at both the ten-year and twenty-year marks. The percentage of respondents rating the issue as having great influence showed a similar pattern, rising from 54 per cent at five years to 69 per cent at ten years and 71 per cent at twenty years. Off-site or virtual service was seen as most important by respondents from 4-year academic libraries and by respondents with technical services positions. By contrast, respondents from school libraries and public libraries and paraprofessional respondents were less likely to rate the issue as having great influence.

Only two issues — the library as an independent institution (versus outsourcing or absorption by larger or separate entity) and the library as a community (or campus) center or gathering place — were consistently ranked at the bottom of the list by respondents. The library as an independent institution ranked last for each of the three time periods under consideration. Only 23 per cent of respondents rated this issue as having great influence five years from the present; only 28 per cent, ten years from the present; and only 30 per cent, twenty years from the present. The library as a community (or campus) center or gathering place ranked third from the bottom for every time period. A consistent percentage of respondents — 41 per cent at five years, 41 per cent at ten years, and 42 per cent at 20 years — rated this issue as having great influence

Issues Expected to Become More/Less Important

As with the challenges above, the survey results can also be examined to determine the issues that respondents feel will grow or diminish in influence in the long-term future. Again, this analysis can be accomplished by comparing the relative difference between the percentage of respondents who rated an issue as having great influence five years into the future and the percentage who rated an issue as having great influence twenty years into the future. Issues are listed below as expected to become more influential if the relative difference in those percentages was greater than 20 per cent. Issues are listed below as expected to become less influential if the relative difference in those percentages was less

than minus 20 per cent.

For the survey's respondents, the following issues were expected to become more influential:

- Service to youth off-site or electronically (virtual)
- Service to adults (or students and faculty) off-site or electronically (virtual)
- Library as an independent institution (versus outsourcing or absorption by larger or separate entity)
- Service to youth off-site or electronically (virtual).

Respondents ranked the issue of serving youth off-site next to last among all issues for the time period five years from today; only 37 per cent of respondents rated the issue as having great influence. But its influence was expected to increase greatly over the long term; 51 per cent of respondents rated it as having great influence twenty years into the future — a relative increase of 38 per cent. The increasing significance of off-site service to youth was felt strongest by respondents from two-year academic libraries and school libraries, respondents in technical services, and respondents with five or fewer years of experience. No group of respondents felt that this issue would become less influential in the long term.

Service to adults (or students and faculty) off-site or electronically (virtual). The ranking of off-site service to adults (or students and faculty) rose from fourth among all issues in five years to a strong third in twenty years. For the five-year period, 56 per cent of all respondents rated this issue as having great influence; for the twenty-year period, that figure rose to 71 per cent. The increasing significance of off-site service to adults (or students and faculty) was felt strongest by respondents from school libraries and public libraries, respondents in administration, and paraprofessional respondents. No group of respondents felt that this issue would become less influential in the long term. Library as an independent institution (versus outsourcing or absorption by larger or separate entity).

While the library as an independent institution was consistently ranked last among the issues by the respondents, the percentage of those who believed it to have great influence rose from 23 per cent at the five-year mark to 30 per cent at the twenty-year mark — a relative increase of 30 per cent. The increasing significance of the library as an independent institution was felt strongest by respondents from 2-year and 4-year academic libraries, respondents in technical services, and respondents with five or fewer years of experience. By contrast, respondents from school libraries felt that this issue would become much less influential in the long term.

By contrast, the survey's respondents expected that the following issues would become less influential:

- Provision of materials in print format
- Service to adults (or students and faculty) on-site in the library
- Provision of materials in print format.

Respondents felt that the provision of materials in print format would have a decreased influence over the years. The issue dropped in rank from seventh at the five-year mark to tenth at the twenty-year mark, and the percentage of respondents who felt that this issue had great influence dropped from 49 per cent for five years from now to 38 per cent for twenty years from now. The decreasing significance of the provision of materials in print format was felt strongest by respondents from 4-year academic libraries, respondents in administration and technical services, and respondents with twenty-two or more years of experience. In an interesting contrast, respondents from school libraries felt that this issue would become considerably more influential in the long term.

Service to adults (or students and faculty) on-site in the library. Likewise, respondents believed that service to adults (or students and faculty) on-site in the library would decrease in significance. While this issue ranked third among all issues for the five-year period, it dropped to seventh for the twenty-year

period. While 56 per cent of respondents rated it as having great influence five years from today, only 45 per cent rated it as having great influence twenty years from today. The decreasing significance of on-site service to adults (or students and faculty) was felt strongest by respondents from 2-year and 4-year academic libraries, respondents in administration, and respondents with twenty-two or more years of experience. No group of respondents felt that this issue would become more influential in the long term.

Key Issues by Group

As with the key challenges above, the key issues for each group of respondents can be examined to show the similarities and differences among groups. (Key issues are defined here as those that more than 70 per cent of the group rated as very significant for a future time frame. This threshold is slightly higher than that set for the key challenges above, because the respondents tended to rate the issues more highly than they rated the challenges.)

Professional status

For respondents who identified themselves as paraprofessional librarians, no challenge was rated as key in the short-term future (five years). However, individual demand for electronic or virtual services and provision of information and content in electronic format were both rated as key issues ten years and twenty years into the future.

The professional librarians agreed that individual demand for electronic or virtual services and provision of information and content in electronic format were key issues and rated them as such for all three future time frames. In addition, the professional librarians also listed service to adults (or students and faculty) off-site or electronically (virtually) as a key issue for the middle-term (ten years) and long-term future (twenty years).

Position

The respondents in public services positions rated individual demand for electronic or virtual services as the only key issue for all three future time frames. However, this group did add the provision of information and content in electronic format as a key issue for twenty years into the future.

By contrast, their colleagues in technical services positions rated three issues as key for each of the future time frames listed — five years, ten years, and twenty years. These key issues included individual demand for electronic or virtual services, the provision of information and content in electronic format, and service to adults (or students and faculty) off-site or electronically (virtually).

For the respondents in administration, these three issues were also key for each of the three future time frames, except for the fact that the administration group did not rate service to adults (or students and faculty) off-site or electronically (virtually) as a key issue in the short-term future (five years).

Type of library

Respondents from 2-year academic libraries and those from 4-year academic libraries were similar in rating three issues as key for each of the future time frames listed: individual demand for electronic or virtual services, the provision of information and content in electronic format, and service to adults (or students and faculty) off-site or electronically (virtually).

For respondents from public libraries, individual demand for electronic or virtual services was the only issue rated as key for all three future time frames. This group did rate the provision of information and content in electronic format as key but only for the long-term future (twenty years).

The respondents from school libraries differed from their colleagues in other types of libraries and rated service to youth on-site in the library as a key issue at five years, ten years, and twenty years into the future. Not only were they the only group to list this issue as key; they were the only group to list a traditional, non-electronic issue as key. In addition, the school librarians rated the provision of information and content in electronic format as key for all

three time frames and they rated individual demand for electronic or virtual services as key but only for the middle-term (ten years) and long-term future (twenty years).

Years of experience

The respondents with the least experience (5 years or less) rated no issue as key in the short-term future. This group did rate individual demand for electronic or virtual services as key for the middle-term (ten years) and long-term future (twenty years), however, and also rated the provision of information and content in electronic format as key for the long-term future.

The respondents with the most experience (22 years or more) rated both individual demand for electronic or virtual services and the provision of information and content in electronic format as key for all three future time frames. In addition, the most experienced respondents rated service to adults (or students and faculty) off-site or electronically (virtually) as key for the middle-term (ten years) and long-term future (twenty years).

Personal Attitude

Each respondent was asked to rate how she or he personally felt about the future of libraries. The majority of respondents (51 per cent) reported feeling somewhat optimistic, and another third of respondents (34 per cent) reported feeling very optimistic. There were far fewer pessimists — only 10 per cent reported feeling somewhat pessimistic, and only 1 per cent reported feeling very pessimistic. The remaining 4 per cent of respondents had no strong feeling.

The respondents from public libraries tended to be the most optimistic, with 88 per cent reporting that they felt somewhat or very optimistic. By contrast, 82 per cent of 4-year academic library respondents, 73 per cent of 2-year academic library respondents, and 71 per cent of school library respondents reported that they felt somewhat or very optimistic. Respondents who classified themselves as professional were more optimistic: 89 per cent of the professionals and 79 per cent of the paraprofessionals were somewhat or very optimistic.

Respondents with positions in public services were slightly more optimistic than those with administrative positions; 88 per cent of the former and 85 per cent of the latter were somewhat or very optimistic. Respondents with technical services positions were less optimistic, and only 71 per cent of those reported that they felt somewhat or very optimistic. Finally, respondents with twenty-two or more years of experience were more likely to report being somewhat or very optimistic than were those with five or fewer years of experience; 89 per cent of the more-experienced group and 84 per cent of the less-experienced group were somewhat or very optimistic.

Other Surveys

The challenges and issues rated as most important by the respondents to the North Carolina survey are similar to those identified by the respondents to the only two other comparable surveys found in the literature.

For example, the 1994 survey of ACRL libraries by Jenkins found that a large percentage of respondents were concerned about assisting faculty and students in using information resources, using electronic communications effectively, getting access to electronic communications and information, and shrinking library budgets.² On the other hand, as with the current survey of North Carolina librarians, far fewer of these academic librarians were concerned with finding quality professional staff.

Likewise, McCrossin's 1991 survey of public library directors found a strong concern with future funding and particularly with how a lack of funding would affect library programs and services. "A number of directors argued that lack of funding made it difficult for them to expand into innovative types of services unless they de-emphasized or abandoned traditional types of programs, and most indicated an unwillingness to do the latter."³ Otherwise, there is little comparison to be made between the North Carolina survey and McCrossin's, which focused on the degree of emphasis that the directors attached to twenty-one different public library services.

Conclusions

The Web survey conducted by the North Carolina Library Association's Commission on the Future of Libraries and the Book drew 325 responses from librarians throughout North Carolina during August 2003.

A number of challenges and issues were seen as consistently significant for three future time frames — five years, ten years, and twenty years into the future. Funding was rated as the most significant challenge by respondent for all three future time frames by a wide margin. Relevance to the user community was a consistent second; and free and fair access to information was the only other challenge to be rated as very significant by more than half of the respondents for all three time frames. Individual demand for electronic or virtual services was consistently ranked first among the issues listed on the survey for all three future time frames, and the provision of information and content in electronic format was consistently ranked as the second most important issue.

Some challenges and issues were seen as growing in importance from the short-term future (five years from now) to the long-term future (twenty years from now). The challenge of competition from the for-profit sector, while ranked last among the challenges in the survey, was nevertheless seen as a challenge that would become more significant in the future. Likewise, the recruitment of professional librarians, facilities, and marketing were expected to increase in importance. By contrast, none of the challenges listed in the survey was expected to decrease in importance.

Three issues from the survey were expected to become more influential in the long-term future. These included service to youth off-site or electronically (virtual), service to adults (or students and faculty) off-site or electronically (virtual), and the library as an independent institution (versus outsourcing or absorption by larger or separate entity). Given the expected increase in influence of off-site, electronic, virtual services, it is not surprising that the two issues expected to decrease in influence were the provision of materials in print format and service to adults (or students and faculty) on-site in the library.

However, the most encouraging result of the survey is that in spite of their concerns, the majority of respondents reported feeling somewhat optimistic about the future of libraries. In fact, 85 per cent of respondents reported feeling either somewhat optimistic or very optimistic. One hopes that this optimism will serve North Carolina librarians well as they face the challenges and issues of the next five, ten, and twenty years.

References

- ¹ Solomon, David J. "Conducting Web-based Surveys." *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 7, no. 19 (2001) Available at: <http://edresearch.org/pare/getvn.asp?v=7&n=19> . Accessed Sept. 17, 2003.
- ² Jenkins, Althea H. (1994). "Members Shape ACRL's Future" *College & Research Libraries News* 6 (June 1994): 368-72.
- ³ McCrossin, John Anthony. (1991). "Public Library Directors Opinions About Future Directions for Library Services." *Public Library Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1991): 5-17, quote on 16.